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SHAKESPEARE.

R.

CONTAINING THE

T R A I T S

OF HIS

R. Shakespeare (w.g.)

CHARACTERS.

L O N D O N :

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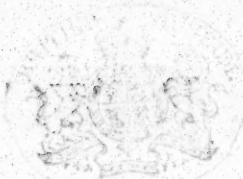
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SHAKESPEARE

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OF THE

THE



INTRODUCTION.

THE knowledge of human nature has been, and still is, universally allowed the most proper study of man. The philosophy of the passions gains us, by a thorough acquaintance with the beauties and defects of the soul, over it an entire empire. In a word, we know ourselves.

What can be more noble than to see the internal beauty and design of well-governed passion? Or more interesting, than to trace the course, if ungoverned, it would lead us through the maze of disappointment—then dashing against the rock of difficulty, till, tired with fruitless efforts, it turns its course, and falls down the abrupt precipice of despair?

Who shall teach us, it may be asked. But can such a question be asked, when so great a master as SHAKESPEARE has left to the world, if I may so term it—the soul anatomized? In his works we trace the origin, destination, and end, of not only,
still

INTRODUCTION.

still to speak metaphorically, the Veins, Arteries, but even the least Fibre. By him we are taught the *true* health of the soul. He discovers the consequence of perverted passion; how it deluges the mind, and destroys society.

To develope his characters, is an arduous task; though, being agreeable to me, I will endeavour it. If so fortunate as to succeed, either in the entertainment or instruction of my Reader, I shall be amply satisfied.

What I propose is, under the Patronage and Protection of the Public, Weekly to publish, what I conceive to be the greatest beauty of SHAKESPEARE—THE TRAITS OF HIS CHARACTERS. The first I present for their approbation, is, MIRANDA, in the Tempest.

MIRANDA.

[No. I.]

M I R A N D A.

*“ The fringed Curtains of thine Eye advance,
 “ And say what thou seest yond.”*

Tempest, Act 1, Scene vi.

BEFORE this speech of Prospero's, are to be traced in Miranda, notwithstanding her seclusion from society, Pity, Gratitude, and a regret for the loss of what she never possessed. How shall we account for all this, if ideas are not innate? SHAKESPEARE, it is true, tells us, that her father was her school-master, and had so choice a library, that he prized it above his Dukedom. It may be said these were the means by which she attained the knowledge—that the distressed deserved her pity; a Service—Gratitude, and the loss of Estate and Title, although never by

B

her

her possessed, yet must be regretted. This is no other than saying, our passions depend on reflection: to which I answer, passion is the cause, not the effect of reflection, and that it is no other than innate sensation.

The motto of this essay places Miranda in the most striking situation of nature: she is desired to look on a being, of whom she never had seen the like; which makes her exclaim,

“ What is't, a spirit ?

“ Lord, how it looks about ! believe me, Sir,

“ It carries a brave form. But 'tis a spirit.”

Having never seen so beautiful a form before, except *Ariel*, she discredits her very sense, and persuades herself it is a spirit. This shews how prejudice misleads the mind.

But what is still more observable in her answer is, the innate knowledge she has of the proportion and beauty of the human form, it being implanted in us to create
that

that affection by which our species exist.
It is so great in her, that she thinks

“ She might call him

“ A thing divine, for nothing natural

“ She ever saw so noble.”

There are two observations I must here make, and those are, our passions greatly depend on circumstance and situation; and our judgement is as much influenced by our passions. Miranda could not but love Ferdinand, and fancy him, when he had no striking deformity, so divine, that nothing natural she ever saw so noble. This depended on circumstances and her situation.—He was the only—the first man she had seen, that nature told her she could love, and made her fancy bias her judgement so far as to say, she might call him a thing divine; when, perhaps, had she seen him in the drawing-room of a court, his person might hardly have attracted from her a second gaze.

From these observations are to be deduced two lessons of instruction : the first is, to consider the circumstantial causes of our Passions, and the second,—to be careful these do not govern our judgement so far, as to lead us into the wilds of error.

“ Why speaks my father so ungently ? This

“ Is the third man that e’er I saw ; the first

“ That e’er I sigh’d for. Pity move my father

“ To be inclin’d my way !”

In this speech you find what has made such wrangling in the world—a surprise that others can differ from us in opinion, when they have neither the cause nor reason to feel or think as we do : Miranda, loving Ferdinand, wonders, and asks why her father speaks so ungently to him ; thinking that he cannot but love him also.

The prejudice of Passion still perverts her reason ; or would she not sooner credit her father, in saying,

—————“ Thou dost here usurp

“ The name thou ow’st not, and has put thy self

“ Upon this island, as a spy, to win it

“ From me, the Lord on’t.”

Than

Than to answer for Ferdinand ?

“ There's nothing ill can dwell in such a temple ;

“ If the ill spirit have so fair an house,

“ Good things will strive to dwell with it.”

When saying,

“ My affections are then most humble : I have no

“ ambition

“ To see a goodlier man.”

She is assured in herself, that a more perfect being cannot possibly exist : the enthusiastic heat of her soul has raised such a mist of Passion in her mind, that, whatever his defects are, she does not perceive them ; and his virtues are increased, to her sight, beyond their real limits. This is the cause of most of our disappointments. Whatever we see through the mist of desire, is increased beyond its real magnitude ; and when approached, or, in other words, possessed, the mist being fled, the object appears in its true proportion ; but how dwindled ! Anger then assumes the place of love,—we are

vexed with the object for deceiving us, but in Justice we, ourselves, deserve it, as being self-deceived. The same may be observed on every other Passion.

Miranda seeing Ferdinand bearing the logs, and being, as she thinks, unseen by her father, gives the rein to her Passion in these words :

“ Alas ! now, pray you,

“ Work not so hard, I would the light’ning had

“ Burnt up those logs that you’re enjoin’d to pile :

“ Pray, set it down and rest you ; when this burns

“ ’Twill weep for having wearied you : my father

“ Is hard at study, pray now rest yourself,

“ He’s safe for these three hours.”

In this we see love displayed in the language of nature : Simplicity, Affection, and Tendernefs vie with each other for the pre-eminence. How far different from the language and feelings of a Court Lady—she only delights in seeing the pain her lovers endure ; and, particularly, if she know herself the cause. But this is not affection—it is pride—the love
of

of courts. I should think where pity finds no shelter, there love cannot exist, however its semblance, by artifice, may be imposed on us.

Let the sighing lover but consider this, and he will no longer remain at the feet of his cruel, inexorable Fair-one: nor the dupe, when the coquette triumphs in her power over him, still continue the just scorn and derision of his sex, in not assuming the resolution of a man, by breaking the servile bonds that are so galling to his peace.

Where is the lady of our day would say to her lover so circumstanced as Ferdinand?

“ If you’ll sit down,

“ I’ll bear your logs the while; pray give me that,

“ I’ll carry’t to the pile.”

And after he has refused to comply, would answer?

“ It would become me

“ As well as it does you; and I should do it

“ With much more ease; for my good will is to it,

“ And your’s it is against.”

I do not suppose, my fair country-women, but either of you, in a state of such simplicity, might be the tender, affectionate Miranda. It is the debauch of city and courts, that refines our passions into the vapours of indifference. Nature is dissipated in the *pursuit* of pleasure.—Pursuit I say ; for let me ask you—does it not elude the very grasp of enjoyment ? You are really to be pitied, not accused, for the loss of what a Miranda must feel in the company of her Ferdinand.

Love makes her fear all for him ; imagining

“He looks wearily.”

it has the entire possession of her heart.—She forgets her duty to her father, by breaking his command, which she confesses, after the fault is committed, in telling Ferdinand her name.

“Miranda—O my father,

“I’ve broke your heft to say so.”

Flattery

Flattery is found to be, now, the most effectual means of gaining the fair. To this Miranda appears insensible. She admires more her lover than herself.

How this language would charm a Coquette !

“ O you, so perfect and so peerless, are created
“ Of ev’ry creature’s best.”

But she simply answers,

“ I do not know
“ One of my sex ; no woman’s face remember,
“ Save from my glass mine own.”

And then continues in the fulness of her soul,

—————“ Nor have I seen
“ More that I may call men, than you, good friend,
“ And my dear father ; how features go abroad
“ I’m skilless of, but, by my modesty,
“ (The jewel in my dower) I would not wish
“ Any companion in the world but you ;
“ Nor can imagination form a shape,
“ Besides yourself to like of. But I prattle
“ Something too wildly, and my father’s precepts
“ I do forget.”

Happy

Happy Ferdinand ! to be the only companion in the world that a Miranda could wish, or imagination form a shape besides yours—that she could like. And this for herself to swear, and that by the jewel of her dower—her modesty. Jewel indeed ! How blest the man who possesses the heart and hand of virgin chastity ! It is a dower, in itself, beyond estimation.

The hope and pleasure with which she asks this question !

“ Do you love me ? ”

I could never hear but my soul joyed itself into tears ; congratulating her on her tender heart having its wish.

There is a seeming contradiction in nature, which is, that tears, the sign of sorrow, should so often be the effect of joy. What is to be said for it ? Does the soul lament its incapacity to bear the excess of pleasure ? Or are tears to be considered as much allied to its extremity, as to that of pain ; and that we, by prejudice of conception,

conception, have falsely considered them as being the proper effect only of sorrow?

However it be, Miranda says,

“ I am a fool

“ To weep at what I’m glad of.”

But why should she become the dissembler, at being asked wherefore she weeps? It is an innate delicacy—she would hide the real cause—the joy of finding herself beloved by Ferdinand. The reflection of a moment tells her it is trifling, and she gives way to the innocent feelings of nature, and assumes its language—these are her words,

“ At mine unworthiness, that dare not offer

“ That I desire to give, and much less take

“ What I shall die to want : but this is trifling :

“ And all the more it seeks to hide itself,

“ The bigger bulk it shows. Hence, bashful cunning,

“ And prompt me, plain and holy innocence.

“ I am your wife, if you will marry me ;

“ If not, I’ll die your maid : to be your fellow

“ You may deny me ; but I’ll be your servant,

“ Whether you will, or no.”

Miranda,

Miranda, knowing Ferdinand will be her husband, and when he offers his hand, gives her own, saying,

“ And mine, with my heart in’t ; and now farewel,

“ &c.”——

That every Ferdinand may be so blest with a Miranda’s heart---and every Miranda have a Ferdinand,

“ With a heart so willing as bondage e’er of freedom,”

Is my sincere wish.——

W.

FALSTAFF.

[No. II.]

F A L S T A F F.

“ *That reverend vice, that grey iniquity, that*
 “ *father ruffian, that vanity in years! Wherein*
 “ *is he good, but to taste sack, and drink it?*
 “ *Wherein neat and cleanly, but to carve a capon,*
 “ *and eat it? Wherein cunning, but in craft?*
 “ *Wherein crafty, but in villainy? Wherein vil-*
 “ *lainous, but in all things? Wherein worthy,*
 “ *but in nothing?”*

The first Part of Henry IV. Act 4, Scene xi.

IN FALSTAFF are to be found the traits
 of an artful, ambitious, vain, volup-
 tuous, avaricious, cowardly, fatirical,
 pleasant-witted knave.

It may be matter for astonishment, that
 so conspicuous a knave could render him-
 self so agreeable to an audience, as to af-
 ford more general entertainment than I

C

believe

believe any character has done that was ever exhibited on the stage. Consider the above motto, which perfectly agrees with his character, and, if possible, withhold your astonishment, that, instead of his being an object of entertainment, he is not an object of disgust and detestation. To unravel the cause, may be both entertaining and interesting.

Falstaff made the pleasantness of his wit the ladder to his knavish designs, and dependence on Prince Henry.

He appears to know not only the key, but the wards of that key to the human heart, and how to adapt them to any lock of treasure he had a design against.

His intimacy with the Prince, he cherished for these reasons, it gratified his vanity, fed his expectations, was his shield from justice, and gained him credit and authority over his myrmidons.

He displays his knowledge how to win the heart, by considering, that when a
man

man herds with his inferiors, it is most commonly for the purpose merely of enjoying that authority and complimentary homage, which he could not among his equals. Therefore he compliments Hal (as he familiarly calls him, the better to disguise his artifice) with

“ I pray thee, sweet wag.”

Again he exerts his artifice to know if Hal has any particular knowledge of their hostess, in saying,

— “ And is not mine hostess of the
“ tavern a most sweet wench ?”

If he could have attained this knowledge, he thought he should have held him and his favours under more controul. But the prince, with a penetration perfectly agreeable to his historical character, sees the design, and foils it by a question as foreign to that subject, as Falstaff's was to that of the preceding.

Falstaff still persists to sift him, although in a manner which may be understood in a different sense ; if the prince chose not to give a direct answer to the question meant, which is,

“ Well, thou hast call’d her to a reck-
“ oning many a time and oft.”

Prince Henry answers the words in a literal sense ; so that Falstaff urges the matter no further, but continues the discourse as the prince chose to understand it.

The reason of his affording so much entertainment, is the same that excuses Prince Henry’s being so fond of his company. He flatters while he reproves, is always in a good temper, tho’ apparently against his inclination. His knavery, vices, and follies, he frankly confesses, which lessens that abhorrence we should otherwise, have for him, and prepares us to be the more pleased with the pleasantry of his humour ; this being much greater
than

than his wit, which is in general but paltry puns, “quips and quidities,” to use his own expression. I quote the following as an example of his admirable mixture of flattery with reproof, and frankness in confessing his viciousness.

“ O thou hast damnable attraction, and
 “ art, indeed, able to corrupt a faint.
 “ Thou hast done much harm unto me,
 “ Hal, God forgive thee for it ! Before I
 “ knew thee, Hall, I knew nothing ; and
 “ now am I, if a man should speak truly,
 “ little better than one of the wicked. I
 “ must give over this life, and I will give
 “ it over ; by the Lord, if I do not, I am a
 “ villain. I’ll be damn’d for never a
 “ king’s son in christendom.”

His answer to the prince’s question,
 “ Where shall we take a purse to-mor-
 “ row, Jack?”

shews how easy it is to detect the pretensions of artifice, when you know the keynote of the soul ; touch but the string, and

all the affections are in unison with it : if you find any sounds of discord, be assured they do not belong to the instrument. So it is with Falstaff ; when thieving is mentioned, he is all over the thief, and, therefore, his so late resolution of reforming discorded with himself : it did not belong to him. It was the shadow of repentance, which fled at the prospect of his avarice being gratified : he flies “ from “ praying to purse-taking.”

Falstaff, like other villains, can excuse himself to himself at the same time he does to others. He says,

“ Why, Hal, 'tis my vocation, Hal, 'tis
“ no sin for a man to labour in his voca-
“ tion.”

When the prince refuses to join them in the robbery, he touches the master-strings of *Hal's* heart. He knew the prince was honest, courageous, and possessed a hearty fellowship for his companions ; and to call these in question, might

might touch him so nearly, as to induce him to give his company. Besides, to tempt him the more, he adds a piece of political satire, to shew that thieving is practised by those who pretend to discountenance it.

“ There is neither honesty, manhood,
 “ nor good fellowship in thee, nor thou
 “ cam’st not of the blood-royal, if thou
 “ dar’st not cry, *stand*, for ten shillings.”

This, for a moment, has the desired effect: Hal agrees to attend them, but the next instant refuses, which makes Falstaff compliment himself as king of the company, and accuse the prince as being a traitor to *him*, in these

“ By the Lord, I’LL be *traitor*, when
 “ THOU art *King*.”

The following should teach our superiors the pernicious effects of bad example. It adds to the eagerness of doing wrong, when it is sanctified by the participation

ticipation of those we look up to for example. Even the abandoned Falstaff was desirous to receive the sanction of his prince partaking in his crime—

“ — that the true prince may (for recreation sake) prove a false thief ;
“ for the poor abuses of the time want
“ countenance.”—

If Falstaff loved any person besides himself, it was Poins. Hal, being Prince Henry, the King's son, it was only his ambition that loved the honour of, and the expectation from the acquaintance. He thought it must be a charm which made him love Poins, in spite of his endeavouring so long to the contrary. When Poins tells him where his horse is, he says,

“ Now cannot I strike him if I should
“ be hang'd.”

It has been a much disputed point, whether Falstaff were a coward or not. If an involuntary betray of fear, in the moment of danger, may be termed cowardice, how
shall

shall we, otherwise, construe his saying,

“Zounds ! will they not rob us ?”

His answer to the Prince accusing him of cowardice,

“Indeed I am not John of Gaunt, your grandfather ; but yet no coward, Hal,” should not be credited in his favour, further than to evince how a man may mistake his own disposition. The truly valiant are diffident of themselves, while the arrant coward flatters himself that he possesses what he could not bear the thought of wanting. The villain sooner knows himself than the coward. Falstaff confesses he is the one, but disowns the other.

When Prince Henry reproaches his running away, he replies,

“Ah ! no more of that, Hal, if thou
“lov’st me.”

If he has any sensibility of feeling, it is in not bearing the imputation of his want of valour.

Here

Here follows another involuntary proof of his own cowardice. We are apt to imagine others feel as we suppose ourselves should in a like situation. Falstaff, after relating the forces raised against the king, and by such bold, resolute warriors, asks,

“ But tell me, Hal, art not thou
“ horribly afeard? thou being heir appa-
“ rent, could the world pick thee out three
“ such enemies again as that fiend Doug-
“ las, that spirit Piercy, and that devil
“ Glendower? Art not thou horribly
“ afeard? Doth not thy blood thrill at
“ it?”

The effects we feel at what I next quote, are sufficient to convince us how dangerous wit and humour are in the power of knaves. They take our hearts in despite of our senses. Although we know them to be all that is bad, yet we cannot withhold our affections. I believe nothing has more power over the heart than a pleasant wit or a chearful humour. It drives
reason

reason from her seat, blinds our faculties, and absorbs our senses in a delirium of mirth. And, as the soul is naturally grateful, for being pleased, it gives its affections to the deluder, notwithstanding he be ever so vile.

“ But to say, I know more harm in
“ him than in myself, were to say more
“ than I know. That he is old, the
“ more is the pity, his white hairs do
“ witness it ; but that he is (saying
“ your reverence) a whore-master, that
“ I utterly deny. If sack and sugar be
“ a fault, God help the wicked ! If to
“ be old and merry be a sin, then many
“ an old host, that I know, is damn’d :
“ If to be fat is to be hated, then
“ Pharaoh’s lean kine are to be lov’d.
“ No, my good Lord, banish Peto, banish
“ Bardolph, banish Poins ; but for sweet
“ Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true
“ Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff,
“ and therefore more valiant, being as
“ he

“ he is, old Jack Falstaff; banish not
“ him thy Harry’s company: banish
“ plump Jack, and banish all the world.”

It has been observed, and with truth,
that the most mirthful are the soonest
depressed by misfortune. So is Falstaff,
after being detected as the coward, and
also in danger of suffering as the thief.
These have visible effects on his temper.
He asks,

“ Bardolph, am not I fall’n away
“ vilely, since this last action? Do I
“ not bate? Do I not dwindle? Why,
“ my skin hangs about me like an old
“ lady’s loose gown. I am wither’d
“ like an old apple John. Well, I’ll
“ repent, and that suddenly, while I
“ am in some liking. I shall be out of
“ heart shortly, and then I shall have no
“ strength to repent. An’ I have not for-
“ gotten what the inside of a church is
“ made of. I am a pepper-corn, a
“ brewer’s horse; the inside of a
“ church!

“ church ! Company, villainous company hath been the spoil of me.”

He exercises his wit on Bardolph for the purpose merely of dissipating his melancholy, playing on him as we would on an instrument, and the quicker succession of notes it affords, the better it pleases. So it is with him, the more Bardolph replies in anger, the more he is delighted, and his melancholy dissipated.

There is another reason for his being out of heart : he finds himself mocked at, and suspects himself abused by his confederates. And he, like all those who are fond of playing upon others, can the less bear being played upon himself. It therefore hurts him to find that, in the company of his associates, while asleep he should have his pockets picked of that which exposed his voluptuousness, his meanness, and his poverty, being

being only tavern bills, containing,

Item, A capon, 2s. 2d.

Item, Sauce, 4d.

Item, Sack two gallons, 5s. 8d.

Item, Anchovies and sack after supper, 2s. 6d.

Item, Bread, a halfpenny.

The halfpenny worth of bread to that quantity of sack, &c. exposes the meanness of his avaricious spirit, while it displays the enormity of his voluptuousness; and there being nothing else found about him, exposed his poverty. He is so angry at this, and being told that Hal said his ring, which he said he had been robbed of, was copper, that he calls him a Jack, and threatens, if he was present he would cudgel him like a dog.

His misapplying the money given him to raise recruits for the king's service, ill requites his Hal's friendship. But, we almost forget his villainy in his humorous description of it.

“ If

“ If I be not ashamed of my soldiers,
 “ I am a fow’d gurnet. I have misus’d
 “ the King’s press damnably. I have got,
 “ in exchange of an hundred and fifty
 “ soldiers, three hundred and odd pounds.
 “ I press me none but good householders,
 “ yeoman’s sons ; inquire me out con-
 “ tracted batchelors, such as had been
 “ ask’d twice on the bans ; such com-
 “ modity of warm slaves, as had as lieve
 “ hear the devil as a drum ; such as fear
 “ the report of a culverin, worse than a
 “ struck deer, or a hurt wild-duck.”——

Nothing convinces the coward he is
 so, but the approach of danger. Falstaff
 now approaching the place and day of
 battle, says,

“ Well,
 “ The latter end of a fray, and beginning of a feast,
 “ Fits a dull fighter, and a keen guest.”

His observations on honour, although
 they be natural to his character, I think
 should be suppressed in the representation ;
 by

by reason as honour is the soul of society, nothing should be so publicly expressed as to lessen our esteem for it.

Among all the villainous acts of Falstaff, there is not one which disgusts us, except his wounding the vanquished Percy. In this he appears more than the coward—the cruel assassin. I should suppose Shakespeare made him guilty of it, to prevent our being too fond of such a villain.

Being some little time disused to his former vile practices, he resolves, if he should be honoured with greatness, to grow less, by purging, and leaving sack, and living cleanly as a nobleman should do.

This proves, that the most abandoned may, by being diverted from their vicious course, be self-induced to reform, and that turning the course of habit's stream, is more effectual in destroying vice, than either precept or example.

